

Positively Creative *Zine*



NEW YEAR HAPPY

Welcome to Positively Creative.

We started this adventure back in July 2020 as a way to stay creative whilst the country was in the middle of lock down.

That first live stream event, featuring artists, film makers, poets and musicians of all different backgrounds has been seen by over 200 people since its first broadcast and would not have been possible without all the amazing creative souls who dedicated their free time towards this project.

As a BIG thank you to everyone who's positivity and creativity has helped so many get through this difficult year I am proud to bring this final Positively Creative event to you all in zine form.

I hope that through reading this zine, or watching our original show (still on Youtube, link on page 30!) it will inspire you to bring your own creative projects into the world this new year.

I look forward to seeing them all.

Karl Birrane

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Cover & Graphic Design by Karl Birrane.

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Unsigned Music Artists

What Have They Been Releasing In 2020?

It's been a very tough year to be a musician - the coronavirus pandemic has left countless artists out in the cold. However, musicians are nothing if not resourceful and it seems the creative flair has not been dampened in 2020.

My name's Chris Tavener, I'm a satirical singer-songwriter living in Manchester, England and I've been working full-time on the unsigned gig circuit for five years now. In that time, I've had the joy of discovering many great and inspiring artists putting out excellent original music. While I have noticed many of them have had to turn to other sources of income, most have simultaneously stayed in the business of releasing songs.

I'd need many more pages to tell you about every single that has caught my ears this year but here are a few picks that are worth checking out.

As I write this, the very latest release that's come to my attention is a song called 'Balcony' by country music artist Izzie Walsh. In the music video, she strides around her home city of Manchester with a charming confidence as a thumping rhythm section plays under some ethereal strings – it's very uplifting! I'm not sure if the balcony is any reference to the social gatherings we've seen on skyscraper balconies in 2020 but it certainly could be interpreted that way.

Country music might be in vogue at the moment, as Katie O'Malley released her latest single 'Wild West' this Summer.

(Continued on Page 6)

WILD WEST
BY KATIE O'MALLEY



Her voice is beautifully haunting on this track that was apparently inspired by knife crime in London. The slide guitar work is wonderful and the chorus really sticks with you for days. If you like Western films, then the video on Youtube is of course Western themed.

Novelty Island was a brand new discovery for me this year. Lead songwriter Tom makes no apologies about being heavily influenced by The Beatles and it in fact plays into their incredibly playful and surreal style. Their song 'Desperately Strange' has some fantastic production and a delightful swaying chorus. The track is complimented by the video that features a crazy photo-shopped pub crawl of the most famous boozers in television.

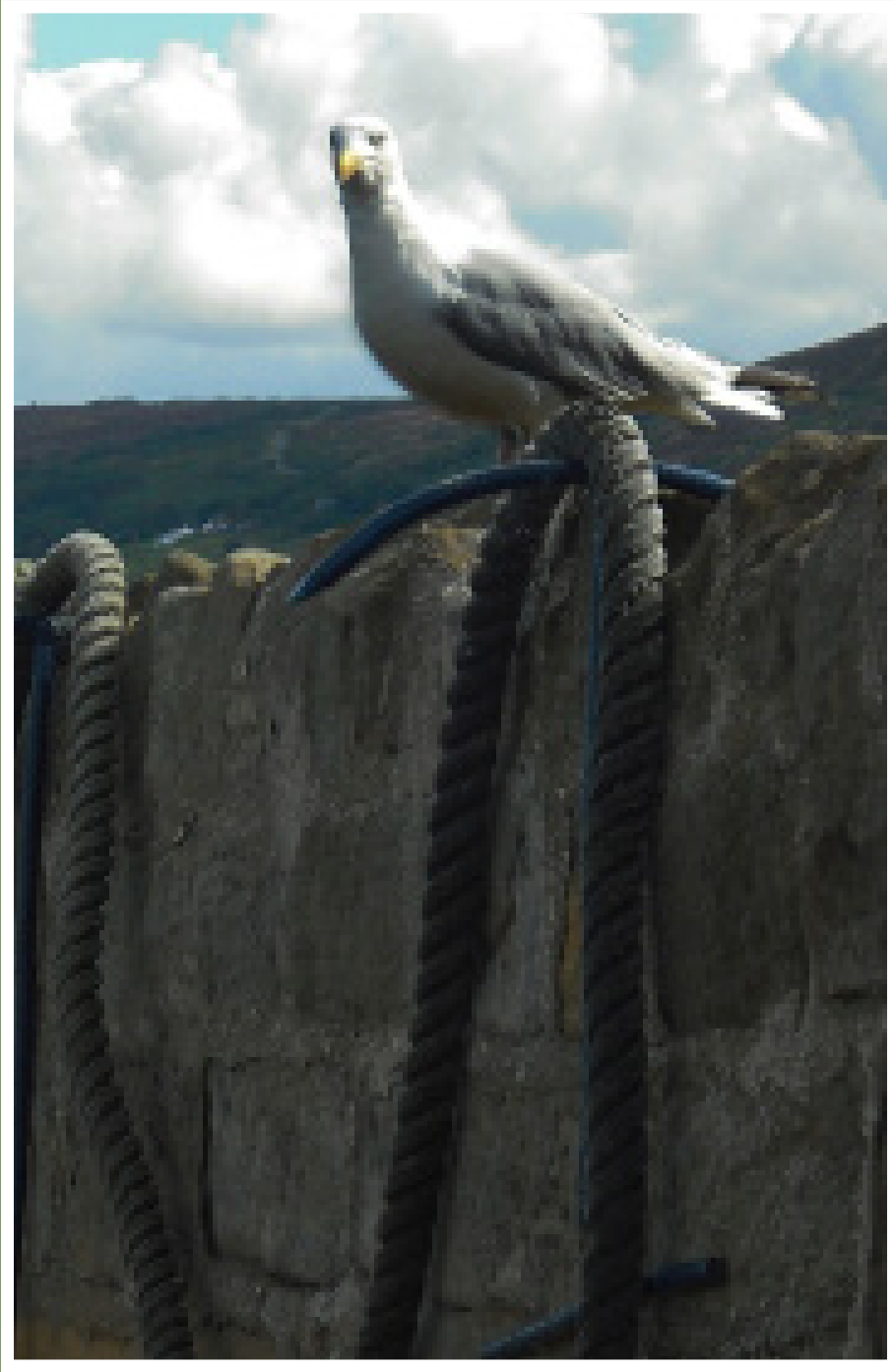
I had to mention an old friend of mine, the finger-style guitarist Joel Gardner. He took on the difficult task of releasing two songs a month throughout 2020 which is no mean feat! There have been a few gems from him but my favourite is a song called 'Twelve Thirty Four'. It's a tranquil track with some soothing Fender Telecaster riffs that really evoke the midnight hour of its title.

I thought I'd end my list of suggestions by talking about an artist who always brightens my day. The affable John Dhali has forever got a spring in his step and his music completely shows it. His 2020 song 'In Time' is no exception with some fuzzy bass, big drums and energetic strings, this track exudes optimism with uplifting lyrics about trusting and loving yourself.

As I previously mentioned, it would take a whole booklet to detail every singer-songwriter that deserves some new listeners, but I've come back to these few a lot this year and I hope you can see why. If you're interested to know more about these artists, please have a look at these suggested tracks from 2020 and become a new follower of theirs as we go into 2021!

SUDDENLY ON SEA
BY NOVELTY ISLAND





I AM NOT A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER

BY KARL BIRRANE

I've been dabbling with photography for most of my life and I'm proud of the many beautiful landscapes I've photographed along the way.

Mother nature however has not always been kind, especially when it comes to photographing her citizens.

When I photograph birds, they stare at me in disgust, as if my lens is only good enough for stones, fields and puddles. In their eyes I am not worthy enough to capture the essence of a majestic seagull.

(Continued on Page 10)



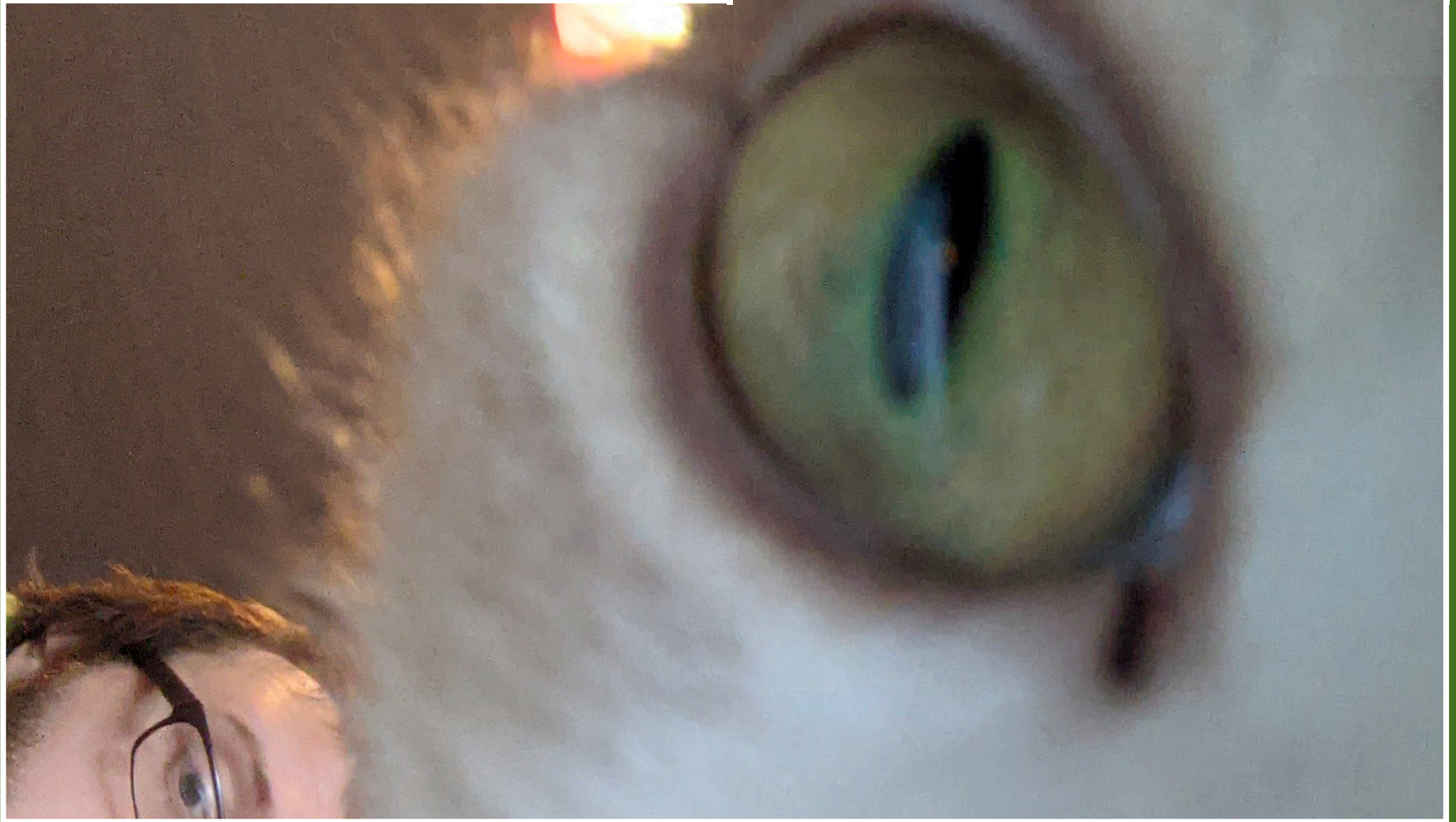
When I walked in the park last week the swans turned around to show their indifference to my photographic talents. One of them told me “Sure, you can take a photograph of a pretty lake but what difference does that make if I’m not floating on it”.



The squirrels always seem to be ready to fight me, I’m not sure if that’s because the Squirrels of Saltwell Park are particularly aggressive, if they have been talking to the swans, or if my previous work has offended the park’s entire population. (Continued on Page 12)



At least after many failed wildlife photography attempts I can go home to my four beautiful cats, always ready to pose for a nice photograph in exchange for a few cuddles and a bag full of treats.



CONVERSATION PIECE

By Evangeline Spachis

guitars / NOISES / vocals in DUCK



Evangeline Spachis, Sarah Griffiths and Chris Minor

As I write this, Christmas has very nearly been cancelled and much of the Yorkshire region remains plunged in Tier 3 restrictions. It is another set of new rules and confusing public messages that have typified 2020 for everyone, most especially for the creative industries.

After a series of delays (namely me breaking my foot in the middle of writing and recording) my band, DUCK, were finally ready to release our second record, *There Are No Normal Conversations Any More*, on CD/digital in January or February this year on the amazing Hell Hath No Fury Records. It was then followed by a launch show at the DIY space Hatch in Sheffield, where two-thirds of DUCK are based. The true scale of COVID-19 was yet to overwhelm us.

Before long, a smattering of March and April tour gigs and summer festival sets were swiftly cancelled, and we joined countless other DIY bands and self-sufficient artists struggling to deal with the national danger of a widening pandemic, personal financial realities and a frustrating inability to plan ahead. And through all of this, Her Majesty's Tory government claimed it would soon be over in 12 weeks.

Over nine months later, the north remains closed for business, with little sign that we will be able to rehearse in 2021, never mind put on a gig in front of a roomful (hopefully) of people (ideally, but other creatures welcome too).

One ray of light during a year of murky prospects though, was a friendly email from Reckless Yes Records in the summer, an independent and ethical label based in Derby, and a creative force that all members of DUCK have longingly admired from afar. Recognising that our album had effectively sunk without a trace when first released earlier in the year, thanks to an inability to tour the album or promote our labour of love without seeming trivial in a time of deathly crisis, its founders Sarah and Pete offered to release the record on vinyl later in the year, something we would never be able to afford independently and never imagined that someone would ever approach us to do.

The unique joy of Reckless Yes, if you will forgive the shameless promotion, is its record club, whereby members will pay a one-off yearly fee to receive a whole roster of new hand-picked music on vinyl, CD or digital, meaning that the bands Sarah and Pete welcome into the fold are granted an opportunity to share their material with music lovers of all kinds, as well as issue their music for general release.

Despite the strangeness of isolation and the devastation of systemic establishment incompetence, getting the opportunity to join up with other female and queer artists on a diverse label has really given us DUCK-ers something to celebrate. Fellow RY signings this year include fellow Leodians Nervous Twitch, The Other Ones, Breakup Haircut, The Crystal Furs, Bitch Hunt, th'sheridans, Hannah Rose Kessler, Paper Birch, Piney Gir and Hearts Beating In Time.

It feels great to be in such talented company and I cannot wait to someday play alongside them in the future.

The reaction to the vinyl release so far has been more than we could have ever hoped for. We have never been that good at self-promotion, so having the likes of RY behind us is a real boost of confidence. The album explores a myriad of occasionally tough themes like domestic violence, menacing online algorithms, escaping the wrath of the Catholic church as a queer person, shitty guys in rock, getting older and juggling self-doubt, so the fact that we managed to make a record people like to dance to, amongst all the doom and gloom, is just lovely.

Being apart as a band has meant that it sometimes felt like the year had truly slipped away from us. But that is nothing compared to the very real threat of losing a once thriving global music, arts and DIY scene. I just hope we'll all be together at our favourite venue of choice and in the thick of it once again, before it's too late. See you at the bar when we do!

There Are No Normal
Conversations Any More is
available on digital and
vinyl via Reckless Yes
Records.

Visit Duck5.bandcamp.com
to find out more and see
the amazing artwork by the
man himself, Karl Birrane!

(Editors note: The check's in the mail)

A red 'NO' sticker is placed on a dark, textured surface that resembles gravel or asphalt. The sticker is slightly torn at the edges, giving it a gritty, handmade appearance. The word 'NO' is written in bold, white, sans-serif capital letters on a red background.

Created in the North East of England.

Living in Newcastle and with Japanese heritage, I design with inspiration from both the British countryside and the rural landscapes of Japan.

Echoing the essence of nature and it's ever-changing moments of beauty, I explore the outdoors and capture the organic patterns and colour palettes that nature provides.

Form, pattern and colour are worked using traditional printing techniques and authentic processes. All my designs are created by hand, a majority of which have been painted using sticks and materials gathered in situ.

A story lies behind each and every design I create. Aiming to spread joy and contentment, I wish to encourage you to live life in a brighter world through colour and pattern.

All my cushions, wallpapers, rugs and prints are made in England by sustainable English manufacturers using eco-friendly processes and ethically sourced materials.

Shiori Naruse founder of Naruse Design.





LA FORÊT

Sometimes it all gets to me!

Sometimes it's too much.

I want to run away. I want to my legs to pump battery acid around my body until it leaves that nasty metallic taste in my mouth.

I will keep running until I leave the city, until the only smoke that's emitted is from my lungs as they burn with exhaustion.

I want my bones to creak and flex the way a new baby sapling does if bent too far.

My heart will smash into overdrive as it tries to keep up with my body's new state of temperament.

The lights behind me will fade as the fire in my eyes burns so bright it melts tears down my face.

I will run until it makes sense, until it all falls into place, until I can reason with this fractured world.

And I will find myself, eventually, in the middle of the forest, the serene sounds coming from the bird calls and running water.
And I'll breath.

The pollen and the smell from the ancient woods. I'll plant my feet like roots and notice them entwining with the rest of the landscape.

My lungs will fill with clean, still air. The history of these hallowed grounds will replenish my worn out organs. Mother Nature will heal me.

And I'll take a second, I'll remember who I am and where I come from. That damage can heal. That time will catch up and solve everything, however far in the future that may be.

But for now, I'll just breath.

By JD Knight

THE COLD ROOM

The blade will sail across icy flesh,
where secrets will pour out.

'Here there be monsters' I'll think.
Without shadow of a doubt.

The Spring of the surface,
will open like a flower.

It's scent not pleasant nor sweet,
but merely deathly sour.

Threads of ruby and tar,
will bind organs together,
the emotions that made them tick,
are now forgotten forever,

This is my job and my duty,
I never forget a face.

Their mask of death or cloak of hate,
marked where time cannot erase.

Yet no-one ever thinks of the coroner,
alone here at night,

"Here there be monsters" I'll say,
and continue on my plight.

For everything will be alright.

By JD Knight

FREE DOGS

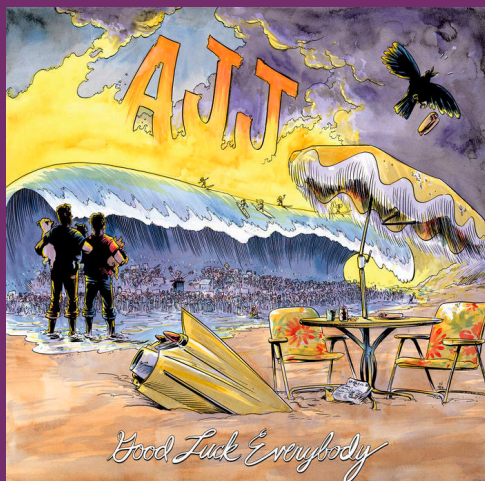
ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

#FREEDOGSAOTY

There were two ways to approach 2020 from a music listening perspective. You could either retreat into familiar comforts, leaning on those songs that remind you of happier times to see you through the isolation and despair. Or you could lean, ear first, into the abyss, discovering what 2020 itself really sounded like, and hopefully discovering a few glimmers of positive creativity (*that'll be £5, Karl*) in the darkness.

I took the latter approach, and in doing so listened to around 200 albums. I managed to narrow my year-end list down to a mammoth 120 (you can find that on Twitter with the hashtag **#FreeDogsAOTY**), but with a 1000ish word count to play with here, that would have been a tall order. So this will be less a year-end list than a stream of consciousness about some of the albums I really liked.

One of the first on the scene this year was the remarkably prescient **Good Luck Everybody** by **AJJ**. Sean Bonnette has always had a



talent for unblinkingly addressing the grotesque nature of the world we live in, so his combination of rage and dark humour was always going to be a handy weapon in staving off the overwhelming misery brought about not only by the pandemic, but by any number of society's pre-existing ills.



Hot on the heels of that, **Brave Faces Everyone** by **Spanish Love Songs**, came from a similar place, as its title would suggest. More personal in its outlook, the Los Angeles punks will no doubt have helped thousands through the darker days with their anthemic cries of "It won't be this bleak forever", which feels more like a statement of truth rather than hope with every day we get closer to 2021.

With an opening track called 'End of the World', **You or Someone You Know** by **Worriers** was always going to rank highly on 2020 album lists. Huge choruses tinged with some sorely-needed positivity helped the Brooklyn punks face up to all the difficult questions we were asking long before we'd heard of COVID.



CONTINUED PAGE 26

Run the Jewels did much the same with **RTJ4**, surely the hip hop album of the year. As with the records already mentioned, they'd be incredible pieces of work at any time, but in the wake of George Floyd's murder, songs like 'Walking in the Snow' and 'Ju\$t' felt impossibly vital. Though they came at it from a very different angle, **Nana Grizol** also interrogated the deeply racist injustices on which their hometown and thousands of others like it are built, in their superb record **South Somewhere Else**.



As these records tackled the terror of the world outside, others reflected 2020 by revelling in their isolation. **Fiona Apple** redefined home-recording with the percussive and subversive **Fetch the Bolt Cutters**, an album that will rightly be in many top 10 lists come the year's end. Also likely to be up there is **Phoebe**



Bridgers with **Punisher**, a record which shimmers throughout with Bridgers' stunningly honest lyrics and vocal delivery. **Color Theory** by **Soccer Mommy** falls into the same category of thoughtful bedroom pop, invoking classic 90s alt-rock and video games on another perfectly-produced set of songs.

Turning to writing and recording in isolation also afforded band members an opportunity to do their own thing. Against Me!'s **Laura Jane Grace** stripped back the noise but delivered a recognisably powerful collection of anthems on the aptly-titled **Stay Alive**. Big Thief's **Adrianne Lenker** retreated to a cabin

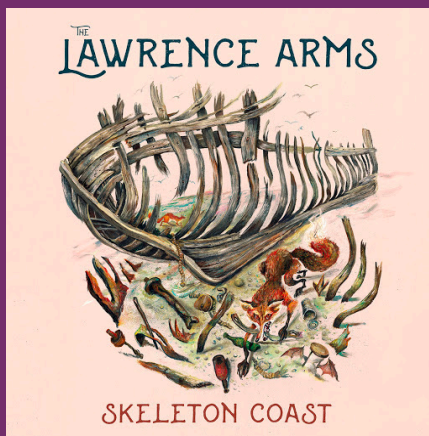
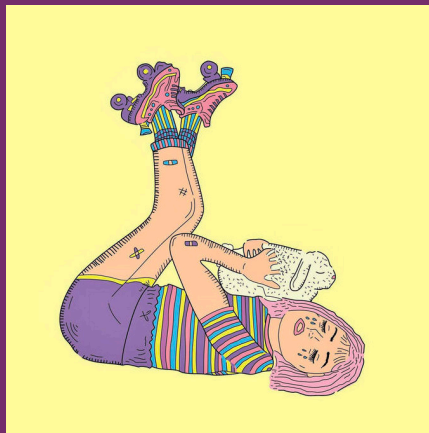


in Massachusetts for the raw and stunning **Songs**. For others, like **The Mountain Goats'** John Darnielle, isolation presented a chance to return to his boombox-recording roots on **Songs for Pierre Chuvin**, before the full band released **Getting Into Knives** later in the year.

Jeff Rosenstock was one of a few artists who managed to release an album which spoke to the year of its release without losing a sense of fun. **No Dream** continues Rosenstock's incredible run of punchy, unpredictable pop-rock classics. The same could be said for New Zealand's **The Beths**, who on **Jump Rope Gazers** deliver yet more irresistibly sunny hooks and sweet ballads - perhaps this year's most generally enjoyable listen.



CONTINUED PAGE 28



Beach Bunny would not be far off that, with their perfectly poppy debut LP, **Honeymoon**.

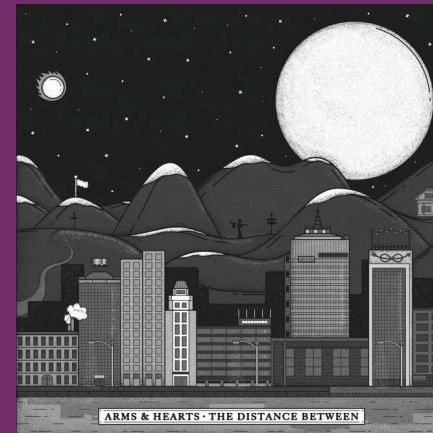
Another incredible first album to emerge this year was **The Baby** by **Samia**. It's rare for such a young artist to have developed such a refined voice and style - it's an album full of earworms but also great depth. Slightly less deep, but also well worth a listen is **2nd Grade's Hit to Hit**, a 24 song stream of brief but catchy indie-rock gems.

It's always nice, too, when one of your all-time favourite bands puts out a record in your hour of need, and **The Lawrence Arms** did not disappoint on **Skeleton Coast**. With 20 years of being a band behind them now, they had no right to be putting out a record this good, further cementing

their status as punk rock gods.

This can't all be about the gods, though - it would be remiss of me not to mention a few of the lesser-known albums I've enjoyed this year. **Arms & Hearts'** long-awaited debut album, **The Distance Between**, was excellent, **DUCK** were bold and beautiful on **There Are No Normal Conversations Anymore**, and acoustic troubadour **Sam Russo's** third album, **Back to the Party**, was his best yet.

So that's my stream of consciousness complete, and hopefully this miserable year complete. Frankly, I hope I'm too busy out of the house, having fun, to listen to 200 albums again next year. Hope your 2021 is a good one - good luck everybody, brave faces everyone.



Lucy's Tarantula Christmas



Georgie



Ruby



Indy



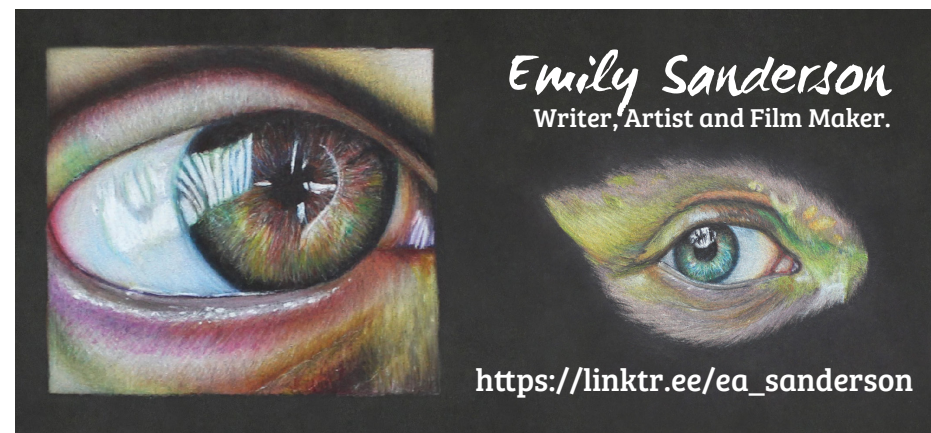
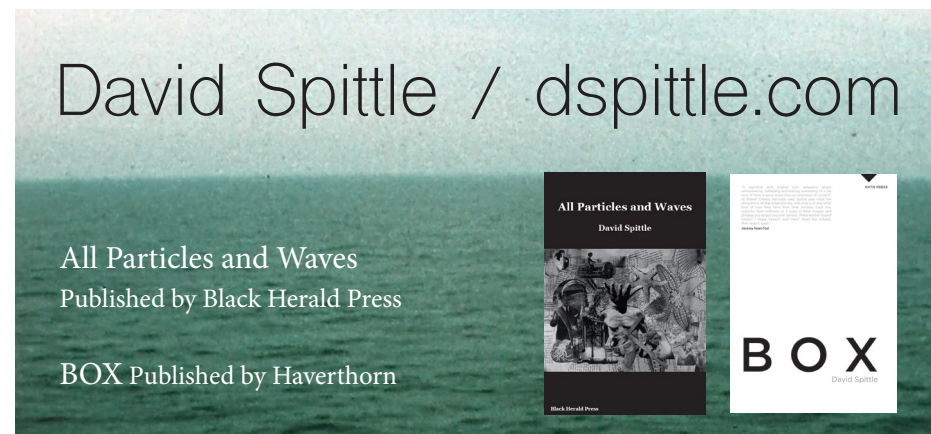
Honey



Cinder

A big **THANK YOU** to everyone who has supported me and those who lent their time and creative talents to put together the Positively Creative live show and zine. Your creativity has been inspiring and your work a beacon of joy in an otherwise dark year.

Aidan Knowles Levitt, Callum McDonnell, Charlie-Dawn Sadler, Chosen G, Chris Tavener, David Spittle, Duck (Sarah, Chris and Evangeline), Elise Watson, Emily Sanderson, Free Dogs (Alex & Josh), George Parry, Grace Denton, JD Knight, Joe Noon, John Baitey, Lucy Foster, Midnight Memphis, Sarah Hymers, Saj Kahn, Shiori Naruse and Travis Roush.





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THE POWER OF POSITIVITY AND TECHNOLOGY